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# EXTREME UNCTION

J. P. ARENDZEN

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**EXTREME UNCTION**



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# EXTREME UNCTION

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## INTRODUCTION

THAT hour in which Extreme Unction is administered is one of deep solemnity. There is no pomp in the rite, no splendor of setting, no dignity required in the minister. Display, magnificence, honor are proved to be but vanities of vanities by the solemn simplicity of Extreme Unction. Death hovers near, and through death the mystery of eternity. The Church makes its final gesture, and resigns a soul to death and God. Loved ones and learned doctors stand helpless before the solemnity of the inevitable. Tear-soaked eyes watch the fingers of the priest as he anoints the five senses. Tongues are hushed and hearts feel gripped while the low voice of the priest prays God to forgive this servant of God whatsoever sin has been done by the eyes and the ears, by the nose and the lips and the palate, by the touch of the hand and the step of the feet. In the black silences of the night, Extreme Unction seems to bring death nearer; in the brilliant, noisy noonday, it makes life seem something distant and alien. At all times, there accompanies it the deep solemnity of life's intensest moment.

## INTRODUCTION

Though Extreme Unction is a sorrow-soaked Sacrament, it should be a Sacrament of consolation. Since one is born to die, one should be glad to die well and to be aided well in the last short step to God's presence. That Sacrament should console which has, for its effects, the remission of grievous sins against God as well as of those sins which are lesser offenses; the remission of the remnants of sin and of temporal punishment of forgiven sins; the potency of spiritual medicine giving strength and vigor to the soul wearied by bodily ills; the potency, oftentimes and in most amazing ways, of curing even the ills and the diseases of one who is on the threshold of eternity. In its effects, Extreme Unction should give joy and peace of soul when the soul needs them most.

In view of these certain results that follow the administration of Extreme Unction, we can agree wholeheartedly with Dr. Arendzen when he vigorously states: "The delay in asking for the Sacrament till death is near or almost inevitable is a lamentable abuse, unfortunately all too frequent. It arises from lack of faith, foolish superstition, or false kindness, or from all these causes combined." Happily, the practice of calling the priest at the beginnings of a serious sickness is becoming more frequent and usual. The example of the wise virgins, with their oil, is more to be commended than that of the foolish virgins, even though the wait until the coming of the bridegroom might be long.

## INTRODUCTION

Almost as lamentable as the abuse from delay is that from the lack of knowledge of the purpose and the meaning of Extreme Unction. Theologians, comparatively speaking, have written less about this Sacrament than about any of the other six. An authoritative catechism of intermediate grade sums up the necessary information about it in twelve questions and answers. There is not, really, much to be said; but what data there may be, is of extreme importance; and since the data is limited, there remains less excuse for ignorance.

Dr. Arendzen omits nothing of importance in this brief treatise. He adduces, on the other hand, nothing that is unimportant. He discusses everything that is essential and wastes no words on matters of impractical speculation. It is essential and important that we should know how and when Extreme Unction was instituted as a Sacrament; that we should have arrayed before us the testimony of tradition; that we should be conversant with the necessities for a valid and a licit administration of the Sacrament; that we should, finally, know definitely what are the effects of the Sacrament. These matters, and those many practical matters that are allied, are treated by Dr. Arendzen in a compact, logical and authoritative fashion.

FRANCIS X. TALBOT, S.J.

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## INTRODUCTORY

GOD in his infinite mercy has encompassed the life of man on earth by the gracious net of his life-giving sacraments. Supernatural life is first opened to him by baptism. The sacrament of the new birth removes the stain of original and of any subsequent sin and it constitutes him the adopted son of God, his heir through the Beatific Vision and co-heir of Christ. In the first years of adolescence, when the struggle with sin begins, God sends him the Holy Ghost in Confirmation to strengthen his soul for the combat which continues all the years of his life. As no life is ever maintained unless sustained by appropriate food, God with gracious bounty supplies a celestial food for the support of the supernatural life of man; he gives him the Manna that comes from heaven in the Holy Eucharist.

During man's sojourn on earth there occurs in the natural order no greater and more

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important change than marriage. A new world of duties and responsibilities as well as trials then begins to surround him and God created the mighty sacrament of Matrimony to support him in his task.

As God knows the clay of which we are made and the frailty of our human nature, he foresaw the shipwreck many would make of their supernatural life. In the sacrament of Penance he gave man a plank of safety by which even those who sinned mortally after baptism might be rescued from being engulfed in eternal damnation.

And finally with divine ingenuity God created the sacrament of Extreme Unction to be the complement and consummation of Penance. By this Unction at the end of life sin itself and the remnants of sin can be totally undone and man prepared for the immediate entrance into everlasting glory.

In itself Extreme Unction is a sacrament of the living. It is meant for those whose souls are in the state of sanctifying grace, but who need support in the stress and strain of grave illness that leads to bodily death. But by an excess of long-suffering pity God made it avail even for those whose souls are in grievous sin but who have begun to return to him by imperfect repentance and who are so overcome by their illness that they can

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think and act no more. Extreme Unction may therefore be regarded as a final triumph of God's tenderness towards men, saving them to the uttermost, and almost in spite of their own weakness and the wiles of the evil one.





**THE INSTITUTION OF THE  
SACRAMENT**



# CHAPTER I

## THE INSTITUTION OF THE SACRAMENT

### (A) SCRIPTURE

THE Council of Trent teaches us<sup>1</sup> that the Unction of the sick was instituted by Christ our Lord, as truly and properly a sacrament of the New Law, insinuated indeed in the Gospel of St Mark, but recommended and promulgated to the faithful by St James.

The words in St Mark vi, 13 are these: "Going forth they preached that men should do penance: and they cast out many devils and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them." Some have seen in these words an account of the use of the sacrament of Extreme Unction during our Lord's life on earth, but the Council of Trent with great caution uses the term "insinuated in Mark," making the healing unction performed by the Apostles rather a forestalling and

<sup>1</sup> xiv, 9, 1.

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prefiguring of this sacrament than the sacrament itself. It is indeed most likely that the unctions and healings performed then by the Apostles were not sacramental in character. Their anointings and prayers over the sick did not constitute an outward sign instituted by Christ signifying and effecting divine grace in the souls of the recipients in virtue of the very sign performed. We need not doubt that the Apostles used unction in the healing of the sick at our Lord's own command. Our Lord used his own spittle mixed with earth to anoint the eyes of the man he cured, he may well have commanded his Apostles to use unction in their healings, but such unction had as direct meaning and purpose the bodily health of the recipient and only indirectly the bestowal of divine grace on their souls. If divine grace was given, it was an uncovenanted mercy in accordance with the faith and repentance of the sick or their friends, not the outcome of a sacrament.

What the Apostles had practised during their missionary journeys when our Lord was on earth, was transformed and raised to the dignity of a sacrament when they went forth into all the world and preached Christ and his resurrection.

We have no record when and how precisely

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our Lord thus instituted this Sacrament of the New Law, but we learn from St James, the Brother of the Lord, in his Epistle to the Jewish Christians, that if anyone were sick amongst them, he was exhorted to receive this sacramental rite.

"Is any one sick amongst you, let him send for the priests of the Church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick man and the Lord shall raise him up, and should he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him; confess therefore your sins one to another and pray one for another that you may be healed, for the fervent supplication of a just man availeth much."<sup>2</sup>

If we consider these words in detail we gather that the first condition for this sacrament is a state of bodily sickness, and that of a serious nature, for the Greek word used indicates some grave ailment. The sick man is evidently in such a state of weakness that he cannot go to the church or the dwelling-place of the priests, but has to beg them to come to him. The English phrase "send for the priests" well renders the Greek expression, which implies not a mere asking of

<sup>2</sup> v, 14-16.

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a favour as one might desire a pious and kind friend to come and pray, but an authoritative demand that these priests should come in their official capacity to do something for the sick man which he could not do for himself. It is to be noted that the word "priests" is in the plural. This fact is undoubtedly the reason why both in East and West, in many places and during many centuries, this sacrament was administered not by one, but by several priests, sometimes seven, or at least as many as were conveniently available. But though the text suggests, yet it does not absolutely demand, a plurality of priests. The priests are thought of as a group of men within reach of the sick person; to send for them can mean to bid them send any one, or several from their number to perform their required functions. For many centuries in the West the custom has prevailed that the sacrament be administered by one priest alone, and this is now the only one sanctioned by authority. This therefore constitutes an infallible interpretation of the meaning of the text.

It is natural to ask whether the words "let him send" constitute a strict command, or merely a wholesome advice, which might be disregarded without serious sin. The words immediately preceding: "Is any of you sad?"

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Let him pray! Is he cheerful in mind? Let him sing!" suggest a counsel rather than a command, but the following words containing a promise of forgiveness of sin for the sick man point to something more than a mere counsel. For a more definite interpretation of the passage we must go beyond the text itself to the interpretation of the Church.

It is obvious that the expression "the priests of the Church" cannot mean "the elders" in the sense of people of more advanced age, but must designate some special officials of the Church, who even in St James' day were designated by the term "presbyteroi," a word of which "priest" is but an abbreviation.<sup>3</sup>

These priests should pray over the sick man. Note that the expression is not "pray *for*" the sick man, which might be done by anyone anywhere, but *over* him, as if they were to recite some powerful formula of impetration, while standing over him recumbent on his bed of sickness. This is in keeping with the words which follow: "anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." The praying and the anointing go together and constitute one combined action. Now

<sup>3</sup> For information regarding the functions of the priesthood see Vol. XXIX.

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this anointing is done "in the name of the Lord." It is not merely some expression of the personal faith either of the sick man, or the priests or the bystanders, some symbolic action indicative of their personal desires or some natural medicinal practice, but it is an actual use of the power of Christ and an exercise of his authority committed to the priests. They act in the name of their Master. It is their Master's power which is brought into play and they are but the functionaries or officials, instruments in the hands of the Lord of the Church.

The effect of this use of divine power is thus indicated: "The prayer of the faith shall save the sick man and the Lord shall raise him up." The prayer is said to be "of the faith"; it is not the mere informal expression of individual supplication by anyone, Jew, Pagan, or Christian, who might be asking a favour of the Almighty, but it is the official exercise of the Christian Faith. It is an appeal to the power of Christ, sanctioned by him and carried out by his representatives. It is most emphatically an act of believers, unmeaning and useless to those not of the faith. The sending for the priests, the acceptance of the Christian rite by the sick man, the administration of it by the functionaries of the Church are typical mani-



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festations of the faith, provoked by the extreme need of the ill person in danger of death. This prayer shall save the sick man.

The word "saving" is quite a general term, as also the expression "the Lord shall raise him up," and considered in itself might refer to bodily healing as well as to spiritual, and to both. The Greek word rendered "raising up" implies awakening, resuscitation, stirring up, bringing to life from torpor or dullness. We must note that in the last verse another word is used, "that you may be healed or cured"; this is normally used of bodily healing alone. If, then, St James here uses a wider term it is natural to conclude that it stands for a wider idea. In the first place the Epistle is throughout concerned with supernatural ideas: a merciful judgment, a happy coming of the Lord, saving the soul from death, the crown of life, the possession of the kingdom, the gift of patience and so on; hence to interpret the word "save" exclusively as meaning the recovery of bodily health would be out of harmony with the mind of St James. Moreover a spiritual but conditional effect is next mentioned, and it is in the highest degree improbable that forgiveness of sins would be thus casually attached to bodily healing; and, finally, the verbs "to save" and "to raise"

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here indicate an unconditional result of the rite performed. Now St James cannot have spoken of the rite as an unconditional means of bodily healing, for it would mean an automatic escape from death, which is an absurdity.

“And if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him.” St James here clearly suggests that the proper state of the sick man when receiving the sacrament should be such that there be no guilt of grave or venial sin upon his soul; but so great is the efficacy of the sacrament that should there be still some stains of sin they will be deleted.

The text continues: “Confess therefore your trespasses one to another and pray one for another that you may be healed, for the fervent prayer of the just man availeth much.” These words have led many to believe that St James had in his mind the combination of the two sacraments: Penance and Extreme Unction.

The priests of the Church administered the last rites to the sick man; but no technical distinction of the two sacraments of Penance and Extreme Unction seems to have been in St James’ mind, especially as the early form of absolution was in deprecativ form, not in that of a judicial verdict. Should there have been any grave matter to confess and

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the sick man still capable of confessing it, the priests would remit this by a specific prayer for its forgiveness and thus reconcile the sinner to God before the anointing; but if the patient were speechless, if the priests knew of no grave fault which needed reconciliation, or if the sick man could recall no serious sin, then the prayer with unction would remit whatever sin there might be on the man's soul, which would prevent or retard his entrance into heaven.

"Confess one to another" is an expression like "obey one another, instruct one another, help one another," with the obvious implication that some are superiors, others inferiors, some teachers, some taught, some in need of help, others able to give it. As St James has mentioned presbyters in the plural, the expression is a natural one; in the Christian community people have to confess one to another, some to make and others to accept the confession. But as St James is not writing a technical treatise on the sacraments but giving homely advice about well-known matters, the mention of forgiveness of sins brings him to urge open avowal of them in the Christian community, but in the proper way and to the proper persons. Then again the prayer of the priests suggests to him the universal power of prayer and its suitability in

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days of illness: "pray one for another that you may be cured." This cure may not always be infallibly obtained, but the prayer of just men is of great power.

Some interpreters detach the words "Confess ye therefore . . ." from the preceding and suggest that St James therewith begins a new train of thought unconnected with Extreme Unction. There can be little doubt, however, that the particle *therefore*, though lacking in some manuscripts, is part of the true text, and in consequence we must postulate some connection with what goes before. Nor is this difficult if we keep in mind St James' unstudied flow of thoughts and expressions, so different from the elaborate treatises of later centuries. The attempts of non-Catholics to utilize the last sentence to rob the previous ones of their sacramental meaning, and on the other hand the endeavour of some Catholics to prove sacramental confession from the last sentence apart from its context or the interpretation of the Church, are alike fruitless.

### (B) TRADITION

The existence of this sacrament, which is thus so clearly indicated in Holy Scripture, is also taught by Christian tradition. Scarcity

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of direct references to Extreme Unction in the extant literature of the early Church is only what we might expect. The Epistle of St James is not a New Testament writing to which early commentators would first turn their exegetical or homiletic efforts. Didymus the Blind, born in A.D. 313 at Alexandria, is the only early Father who is known to have written a commentary on St James, and this, with the exception of a few fragments in a Latin translation, is lost. We have to wait four hundred years for the next commentator, St Bede. In Apologetic literature the defence of the Christian faith against Paganism would not naturally call for a reference to Extreme Unction. Great sermons, that are handed down to posterity, usually deal either with great historical occasions or with topics which need lengthy and repeated exposition to the faithful. They deal with public functions, feast days, or such parts of the life of the faithful as need considerable preparation. Hence reference to Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist and the Penitential discipline are not infrequent.

Extreme Unction is in some sense a private matter withdrawn from the public life of the Church; though the sick were sometimes brought to the Church, this was of necessity a very rare occurrence. Moreover, Christians

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of the first four centuries living in overwhelmingly pagan surroundings and at a great distance from priests would very often be unable to call them to their sick-bed for the purpose of anointing. In our own day public references to Extreme Unction, whether in the pulpit or in print, are not frequent, and we cannot expect them to have been more frequent in the early days. The bulk of the faithful now have easy access to their priests and there are not many obstacles to the reception of this sacrament. Most of our present-day references consist in exhortations to call the priest to the sick in good time and the Last Sacraments are referred to generally without separate and express mention of the Unction.

In early days the technical term, Extreme Unction, had not yet been invented; the rite was often called the "imposition of hands." But as the same name was also given to Reconciliation, or Penance, as we now call it, it is not always possible to prove that Extreme Unction is meant; the more so as the imposition of hands for the Unction was regarded as supplemental to the Reconciliation and as constituting one whole with it, just as Confirmation was attached to Baptism as the complete initiatory rite. Thus the distinctness of the sacrament is often not directly emphasized.

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If we take all this in consideration it is rather surprising that allusions to Extreme Unction should be so frequent as they are. A number of early Latin, Greek, and Syrian Fathers refer to the unction of the sick, though only incidentally. These indications are indeed clear enough, especially in their cumulative force, for Catholics who already believe that Christ instituted this sacrament, but hardly strong enough to convince a gainsayer.

Tertullian rebukes heretics for abolishing the distinction between priests and laity, and says that they even permit women "to teach, to dispute, to perform exorcisms, to undertake cures, perhaps even to baptize." This is evidently a series of specifically clerical functions. There was therefore a function of healing the sick which was exclusive to the clergy. This cannot be miraculous or charismatic healing, which Tertullian, even if oil were used for the purpose, did not limit to the priests. He can therefore only be alluding to sacramental healing according to the prescription of St James: "let them send for the priests."<sup>4</sup>

A direct reference to the texts dealing with Extreme Unction occurs in Origen's second homily on Leviticus (c. A.D. 240) and, re-

<sup>4</sup> *De Praescr.*, c. 41, compared with *Ad Scap.*, c. 4.

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markably enough, in a list of means of the forgiveness of sins after baptism.

Aphraates, born in Persia in A.D. 336, extolling the power of oil in the Christian religion, writes of it as the token "of the sacrament of life by which Christians (in baptism), priests (in ordination), kings, and prophets are made perfect, it (oil) illuminates darkness (in confirmation<sup>5</sup>), anoints the sick, and by its secret sacrament restores penitents."<sup>6</sup>

Non-sacramental anointings are here included, but in any case they are an enumeration of spiritual effects of the use of Holy Oil among Christians, and the natural implication of the words is the existence of a grace-giving rite administered by unction to the sick for a spiritual purpose and not merely for bodily healing.

St John Chrysostom (about A.D. 380), in the third book of his famous treatise on the Priesthood, has a passage the significance of which can hardly be overlooked. He wishes to show that we owe to priests even more than to our parents; the latter gave us natural birth, but the former a supernatural one. "There is between the former and the latter

<sup>5</sup> This initiatory rite is called in the East *photismos*: illumination.

<sup>6</sup> Dem. xxiii, 3.



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as much difference as there is between the present life and the life to come. For our parents cannot shield their children against bodily death, or drive away oncoming illness; but priests have often saved the soul that is sick and about to die.”

For some souls they have lightened the punishment, others they did not allow to fall at all, and this not only by their teaching and their advice, but by the help of their prayers. Nor is this only so when they regenerate us (by baptism), but afterward also they have the power to forgive sins, for indeed, “Is any one sick amongst you, let him send . . .”<sup>7</sup>

The attestations increase in number and clearness as the centuries pass on, and by about A.D. 700 it is historically demonstrable that amongst Christians there existed a sacramental, grace-giving rite conferred upon the sick to purify their soul and restore their bodily health, if God sees fit. Our own St Bede is a conspicuous witness, attesting the faith of Celts and Saxons, less than a century after the arrival of St Augustine from Rome and the death of St Columba in Iona. It is worth while to quote his commentary on St James: “As he (St James) had given his

<sup>7</sup> In Greek “saved” and “sick” are the identical terms of St James.

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counsel to the man who is sad, so he gives it also to the man who is sick, how he has to guard against the folly of murmuring, and he accommodates the kind of medicine to the kind of wound. . . . If anyone is sick in body or in faith he commands that he who received the greater injury should remember to cure himself with the help of many, and indeed of priests . . . and let them pray over him. We read in the Gospel,<sup>8</sup> that the Apostles did this also, and now the custom of the Church holds that the sick should be anointed with consecrated oil by the priests and that by the added prayer they should be healed."

So normal in those days was the administration to the sick of the three sacraments, Penance, Viaticum, and Extreme Unction, that in a capitulary of Charlemagne of 769, amongst the ordinary duties of the clergy this threefold administration is inculcated. Nor was this custom limited to the West, it existed also in the East, and even sects separated from the Church since the fifth century retained it, and referred its origin to Apostolic times. It is inconceivable that this universal practice should not be what it claims to be: part of the grace-giving system of outward signs derived from Christ himself.

<sup>8</sup> Mk. vi, 13.

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Sometimes indeed there may be doubt in an individual case whether the sacrament of Extreme Unction is meant, or merely some sacramental, a pious rite instituted by the Church for the restoration of bodily health. It is certain that at least for some five hundred years the use of blessed oil as a sacramental, apart altogether from the sacrament, was in use in many places.

This is parallel to the use of Holy Water or even of Baptismal Water, consecrated on Holy Saturday, as a sacramental, independently of Baptism itself. It was customary for the faithful during the Mass to offer and for the priests to bless oil, which the faithful then took home with them and used either as a drink or a liniment in case of illness, with pious trust in the prayers of the Church for those who used it in faith and reverence. It seems also that locally and for a time even oil consecrated for Extreme Unction was allowed so to be used by the faithful, obviously on the understanding that, unless it were used officially by the priests of the Church with the proper prayers for the administration of the sacrament referred to by St James, it was no sacrament, but only a sacramental for private use. Such at least is the almost unavoidable implication of the famous letter of Pope Innocent I (A.D. 416) to the

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Bishop of Eugubium in which he speaks of "the holy oil, which, blessed by the bishop, not only priests but all Christians may use for anointing themselves and theirs when in need." The oil here spoken of is certainly that blessed for Extreme Unction, which, according to this Pope, bishops and priests use in carrying out St James' behest, and which may be used only for the faithful, not for those who are excluded from the sacraments.

There are instances on record in the lives of the saints which show that in practice sacramental use of Holy Oil for the sick was clearly distinguished from charismatic use. A telling example is that of St Hypatius, who died about the year 446 in the East. This saint before he was ordained used to perform miracles of healing by anointing the sick with consecrated oil, though he was not in Orders. Yet he was fully aware of another kind of anointing which only priests could perform. We read in his life-story, written by a contemporary: "When there was need of anointing the sick man, he informed the abbot, for he was a priest, and had the unction with the consecrated oil performed by him. And it often occurred that through God's co-operation with his efforts, he sent the man home restored to health."<sup>9</sup> Clearly the

<sup>9</sup> See his Life in the Bollandists, June 17.

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priest-abbot could do something which the lay-monk could not do.

No doubt sometimes amongst the uneducated or superstitious charismatic unction conferred by some reputedly holy lay-monk may have been preferred to sacramental anointing, or the two may have been confused in the minds of a few, but never by Church authorities or by the well-informed laity. Isaac of Antioch, a bishop who died in A.D. 460, in great old age, thus rebukes foolish women who for the Unction prefer a wandering unknown monk to the proper priest of the circuit: "Woman, give thy alms to the recluse, but receive the unction from thy priest; support the monk, but let thy oil be that of the Apostles, the oil of the Crucified One, receive the unction from the priest. They neglect the oil of the apostles and martyrs who have suffered for the truth, and the oil of fraud glistens on the face of perverted women. Christ's servants, the right-believing, have indeed the custom of bringing their sick to the altar, but dare not administer the oil lest they should seem to condemn the home of expiation. Where there is a priest to lead the people, they observe the true laws." The very condemnation of these abuses by this famous poet-bishop indicates the correct ecclesiastical usage.

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That a clear distinction was drawn between the official, public, sacramental use of oil by the priest and its private use by the faithful is plain from the occurrence of distinct formulas of blessing for the two purposes. A remarkable instance is found in the prayer over the oil of the sick in the Sacramentary of Serapion, the Bishop of Thmuis, a friend of St Athanasius (about A.D. 350).

"We invoke thee, thou who hast all authority and power, Saviour of all men, Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and we pray thee to send healing power from heaven from the Only-begotten Son on this oil in order that from all those who are anointed or who partake in thy creatures here present it may drive away all sickness and all infirmity, that it may serve them as an antidote against every demon, that it expel from them every unclean spirit and banish every evil spirit, chase away every fever and chill and every sickness, that it may grant them good grace and remission of sin, that it may be unto them a remedy of life and salvation, that it may bring them health and integrity of soul, of body, of spirit, a perfect constitution. O Lord, may every satanic power, every demon, every snare of the adversary, every blow and torment, every sorrow, pain, or shock or disturbance or

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evil shade fear thy holy name which we invoke at this moment, and the name of thy Only-begotten Son. May they vanish from within and without thy servants, that glory be unto the name of him who was crucified for us and rose, who bore our ills and our weaknesses, even Jesus Christ who shall come to judge the living and the dead. Through him be unto thee the glory and the power in the Holy Ghost now and for ever. Amen."

On the other hand, the prayer to be said over the oil offered at Mass is much shorter and of much more general import. The blessing of oil for the sick, intended for devout but not sacramental use, now only survives in the beautiful blessing of the oil of St Serapion, but formerly it was very widespread and for a time almost universal. Such use of oil in illness was so common that St Chrysostom, preaching at Antioch, could appeal to the experience of his congregation to acknowledge that many were cured by being anointed with the oil of the holy lamps in church.

In legends of the early saints, whether priests or layfolk, miraculous cures are ascribed to unction with oil. Here there is no question of the ordinary administration of a sacrament, but the cure is attributed to the

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intercession of a Saint in fulfilment of Christ's last promise recorded in St Mark xvi, 17, 18. "These signs shall follow them that believe: In my name they shall cast out devils . . . they shall lay their hands upon the sick and they shall recover." This use of oil as a sacramental in the early Church, with its consequent employment by the saints as an instrument for the exercise of miraculous powers, has led some non-Catholics to the erroneous supposition that Unction as a grace-giving rite for the sick and a true sacrament emerged only later in the Catholic Church. Of such gradual development, however, history knows nothing. The only rational interpretation of the facts is that sacrament and sacramental existed side by side from the beginning, but that the almost total discontinuance of the devout private use of blessed oil made the grace-giving character of the Jacobean rite stand out more clearly in the eyes of the children of the Church.

When in the twelfth century theological precision singled out from all sacred ceremonies in use in the Catholic Church seven, and seven only, that were outward signs of inward grace, instituted by Jesus Christ, bestowing *ex opere operato* the grace they signify, Extreme Unction was always mentioned among them. To quote but one ex-



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ample, the Penitential attributed to Egbert of York (766), but containing also matter of a century after his death, refers to the unction prescribed by St James for the sick and says: "Every one of the faithful must, if possible, obtain for himself this unction and whatever is ordered concerning it, for it is written that if anyone submits to this discipline his soul after death will be as pure as that of a child dying forthwith after baptism." The phrase *scriptum est*, "it is written," though it does not refer directly to a text of scripture, shows that the writer was not giving some private opinion of his own, but merely echoing the long-established teaching of the Church. No writer at any time shows any indication that he is innovating; rather he stresses the traditional character of the usage. In many ordinances of those days priests are told to instruct the faithful in this sacrament and to deter them from foolish superstitions then so rife in time of sickness. Priests are to carry the Holy Oils on their person when on a journey in order always to be able to anoint the sick. It is one of the normal functions of their ministry. They are gravely responsible if through their fault the faithful should die without this sacrament, to which they have a strict right. Some writers go even so far

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as to speak of it as necessary. All connect the practice with the text of St James, but none say that it was instituted by him, but only recommended or commanded. Its origin goes back to Christ himself, and the apostolic anointings at the command of Christ during his earthly lifetime are a foreshadowing of it. In fact, the faith of the Church on this point in the eighth century is demonstrably identical with that of the twentieth, and from the eighth century backwards whatever evidence exists—and it is considerable—points in the same direction; while there exists no cogent evidence to the contrary at all.

The absence in the four Gospels of explicit mention of the institution of this sacrament should not cause surprise. In Christ's final address to his apostles he told them to teach all nations "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." One of those many observances which he had commanded may well have been a grace-giving rite of anointing the sick. He may have spoken of this during the forty days he spoke to them after the resurrection about the Kingdom of God; he may have taught them before the resurrection, or again he may have revealed it to them by direct revelation after Pentecost. One thing is certain, he alone can attach a spiritual

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grace, the forgiveness of sins, to any outward sign; he alone can institute a sacrament. Christ alone, therefore, instituted Extreme Unction, and even had St James never recommended its use, it would still be what it is, a sacrament which Christ gave to his Church.

No definite heresy is known to have existed with regard to this sacrament before the Reformation. The Albigensians seem to have had a contempt for the use of it, but their tenets, being dualistic and Manichean, can hardly be regarded as a heresy from Christianity, since they are a fundamental denial of it. Their special hatred and contempt may have been aroused by the undoubted abuses in its administration, which were apparently widespread. The clergy—for several priests were then often engaged in conferring it, either together or on consecutive days—insisted on payment for their services and made the reception of it a burden on the poor. The law that the sacrament be administered by one priest alone in the West was made chiefly to deal with this difficulty, and also in consequence of the ostentation of some of the rich, who made vain display of their wealth by calling in a number of priests to administer it.

The Reformers were unanimous in rejecting

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this sacrament though they differed amongst themselves as to the grounds of the rejection. In England the Reformers at first retained it, but it was omitted in the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI. Recent attempts to reintroduce the Unction of the sick among English Protestants are not intended to restore this ceremony as a grace-giving rite, or as a true sacrament in the Catholic sense, but have in view a charismatic gift of bodily healing, such as they think it to have been in the early Church. Their practice therefore, even if it were not invalid for lack of priests and for lack of consecration of the oil, has nothing in common with Extreme Unction in the Catholic Church.

THE ADMINISTRATION OF  
THE SACRAMENT



## CHAPTER II

### THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

THIS sacrament can be validly administered only by a priest. The ordinary minister according to strict Church law is the parish priest of the place where the patient lies sick, and the administration of this sacrament by another priest against the will of the parish priest would be illicit. Religious institutes, however, are usually exempt by Pope or Bishop, and the normal minister would be the Superior or the Chaplain. In case of necessity, or with the permission of parish priest or bishop, whether actually given or reasonably presumed, any priest may administer it. The parish priest is bound in justice to do so, or at least see that it is done. His curates obviously possess a permanent delegation in this matter. Strictly speaking, therefore, the sick person has no absolute right to demand any priest of his choice for the administration of Extreme Unction,

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although he can choose any confessor he likes; but the sick person's expressed wish, unless quite unreasonable, will rarely be refused. In case of necessity any priest is bound by the law of charity to administer this sacrament.

The law in the West requires the sacrament to be administered by one priest only, but in the Greek Catholic Church it is administered when possible by several priests, though the sufficiency of one priest is of course acknowledged. Where several priests are employed the procedure has varied considerably; sometimes they anoint and pray successively, either on the same or consecutive days, sometimes they anoint and pray altogether, each anointing a separate member of the body, or each anointing the same member. Pope Benedict XIV denounced the practice in which some anointed silently and the others prayed without anointing, and declared that at least one priest should both pray and anoint at the same time.

There has likewise been considerable variation with regard to the parts of the body anointed in this sacrament. At present the eyes, the ears, the nostrils, the lips, the hands, and the feet are anointed. The anointing of the feet may for any reasonable cause be omitted, and when there is danger in delay



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or any other sufficient reason a single anointing of one organ of sense, or better, of the forehead, suffices for the validity of the sacrament. But the priest is strictly bound, as soon as the necessity ceases, to continue with—or, if possible, later on, to supply—the anointings and the prayers for each of the five senses. It is held by some that in such cases the supplementary anointings become merely ceremonial, strictly obligatory indeed, but not part of the sacrament itself. The obligation to supply the five anointings would be similar to that of supplying the ceremonies of baptism, grave both for the priest and for those in charge of the child; yet such ceremonies are not part of the sacrament. Most theologians, however, hold that in the case of Extreme Unction these anointings belong to the integrity of the sacrament itself, and that they have sacramental efficacy in deleting the consequences of sin committed by the respective senses.

If the sole reason for the short form of anointing be the immediate danger of death of the one patient, the priest would forthwith continue with the five prayers and anointings after the first prayer and anointing on the forehead. If, however, the necessity arises from another source, the needs of others in a hospital, on a battlefield, an accident in which

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many are injured, the danger to the priest himself in pestilence or war, then the five anointings must be supplied later, if possible within about an hour, otherwise the moral unity of the administration of the sacrament is broken. These anointings may be supplied either by the priest who anointed the patient's forehead, or by any other priest; the parish priest of the place would have the obligation of doing so.

The laity are anointed in the same way as bishops and priests, with this exception that the latter are anointed on the back of the hands, whereas the laity are anointed on the palm. This distinction is at least as old as the twelfth century and the reason given is that the palm of the hands of the priest is anointed at his ordination; it is thus expressive of the reverence due to the sacredness of those hands which have been in constant contact with the Body of Christ and were instruments in administering the other sacraments; it also reminds the priest who is anointed that sins done by consecrated hands are invested with a greater malice and quasi-sacrilegious character, needing the special mercy of God.

The sacramental form or the words used in Extreme Unction in the Latin Church are: "By this holy anointing and by his most

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tender mercy may the Lord forgive thee whatever thou hast done amiss by thy sight, hearing, smell, speech, taste, touch, and walk." This essential form is preceded and followed by prayers and imposition of hands, the omission of which, however, would not invalidate the sacrament.

In the Greek Church Prayer-Uncion (Euchelaion) is given in these words: "Holy Father, physician of bodies and souls, heal this thy servant from the infirmity of body and soul that holds him." This form is pronounced only once while the forehead, chin, cheeks, hands, nostrils, and breast are anointed.

The anointing is done in the form of a cross by the thumb of the priest, unless in case of infectious disease it be advisable to use some intermediary matter, as wool or cloth. The Oil used is olive oil blessed by a bishop, or by a priest who has received authority from the Pope to do so.

In the Greek Church by a permanent delegation from the Pope the priests bless the Holy Oil each time before administration. In the Latin Church the blessing of the Holy Oils for Baptism, Confirmation, and Extreme Unction takes place once a year on Maundy Thursday during the Sacrifice of the Mass with great solemnity. The Oil for the sick

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is first exorcized and then blessed in this way:

*Exorcism.* "I exorcize thee, most foul spirit and every invading devil and ghost, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, that thou depart from this Oil so that it may become a spiritual unction to strengthen the temple of the living God: that the Holy Spirit may dwell therein through the name of God the Father Almighty, and through the name of his most beloved Son our Lord Jesus Christ who is to judge the living and the dead and the world by fire. Amen.

"Let us pray: Send down, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy Holy Spirit from heaven on this olive oil, which thou hast deigned to produce from the green wood unto the health of mind and body, and may it be through thy holy blessing unto everyone who is anointed by the unction of this heavenly medicine a safeguard of mind and body to drive away all pains, all infirmities and every sickness of mind and body. Since thou hast anointed kings, priests, prophets, and martyrs, let thy ointment be perfect, O Lord, blessed for us by thee and remaining within our inmost selves. In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ."

Administration without consecrated Oil

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would certainly be invalid. If by mistake the Oil for Baptism or Confirmation were used, it would be doubtfully valid. If in the West the Oil for the sick were blessed by a priest without a special Apostolic faculty to do so, this would not only be illicit, but Extreme Unction, conferred with such Oil, would be invalid. Different explanations of this fact have been given. The best seems to be this: that the power and dignity required for the blessing of the Oil is by Christ's will inherent in the Episcopate alone, but through delegation the power and dignity of the simple priesthood can be so enhanced that priests can be the instruments to convey this episcopal blessing. Whether this is merely a matter of jurisdiction, or also of the sacrament of Order, cannot be decided. Nor can it be determined with certainty whether the power of the priests in the East comes to them directly from the Pope, or from their bishops with consent of the Pope.

The Holy Oils, thus consecrated once a year, each parish priest is bound forthwith to obtain from his own bishop, and he is not allowed, except in case of necessity, to use those consecrated in the previous year. He is bound to keep the Holy Oils in a locked cupboard in the church. They are usually kept in the aumbry in the wall of the sanctuary

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on the Gospel side. He is not allowed to keep them in the presbytery except for some good reason, approved by the bishop. In England, where frequent and sudden sick calls in large parishes make it desirable that the priests should have the Oil for the sick always immediately at hand, this is often permitted, especially if the presbytery is at some distance from the church. This, of course, applies only to the Oil for the sick; the Chrism for Confirmation and the Oil for Baptism must always be kept in the church. If during the year the Oil for the sick should give out, it is permissible to add unblessed olive oil to the Consecrated Oil, but always in minor quantity. The Oil of the previous year is poured into the Sanctuary Lamp and thus or otherwise burnt.

The sacrament can only be administered to the faithful who after having reached the age of reason are in danger of death through illness or old age. Hence it must not be administered to non-Catholics, though they have been baptized and though they may be in good faith. Since for baptized persons, who are in mortal sin, but who have the implicit wish to receive this sacrament, it may be the only way to remission of sin and eternal salvation, some theologians argue that it might be given to well-disposed non-

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Catholics who are unconscious and in grave danger of death, if this could be done without scandal. Be this as it may, no priest could administer it to a non-Catholic, even though he asked for it in good faith, as long as he refused to be received into the Church.

The age of discretion required cannot be precisely determined. The child must be able to distinguish between good and evil, and this it normally begins to do about the age of seven. The subject must be in danger of death through infirmity, *i.e.* either some specified disease or at least old age. Hence it cannot be given to soldiers before battle, or criminals before execution. It is essentially a sacrament for the sick. But the danger of death here referred to does not need to be immediate. Any grave illness, any illness the final issue of which is seriously doubtful, justifies the administration of this sacrament. Hence it may be administered in the case of any major operation or any disease of which a considerable percentage normally die. It is most emphatically not a sacrament of the dying, but a sacrament of the sick.

The delay in asking for the sacrament till death is near or almost inevitable is a lamentable abuse, unfortunately all too frequent. It arises from lack of faith, foolish

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superstition, or false kindness, or from all these causes combined.

Lack of faith is shown by failing to realize on the one hand the great spiritual needs of the sick, when the soul is enfeebled by bodily pains and sickness, and, on the other, the great might of this sacrament to comfort the soul in its distress. Lack of faith appears likewise in not trusting to the divine power of this sacrament for the healing of the body but confiding merely in human medicine, to the exclusion of that supernaturally provided by God. Foolish superstition not infrequently makes either the sick or their neighbours fancy that the coming of the priest to administer the last rites is a bad omen, almost inevitably foreboding death. This superstition is dishonouring to God and degrading to common sense, as well as to the religion which these people nominally profess.

The third reason, "false kindness," is perhaps the most frequent reason for delay. It is imagined to be cruel to let the sick man know of his danger. "Humanitarian" doctors, relatives, and friends often vie one with another in the attempt to hide from the unfortunate patient his real state of health; they try to buoy him up with the promise of speedy recovery until the last hour of his life.



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No one around the sick-bed dares to tell the truth, they fear that the knowledge of the gravity of the disease will have an adverse psychological effect on the patient, robbing him of that calm and strength of mind which are so powerful a factor in restoring health. Often, however, this is only a pretence or a self-deception. The real reason is moral cowardice, no one having the courage to perform the unpleasant duty and face "a scene." As to the plea that it is better for the patient not to know, those who argue in this way forget that the sick person is often worried more by uncertainty than by knowing the worst. The patient may often think it a fine thing to show a brave exterior, while inwardly he is tormented by doubts as to his real state, and it often comes to him as an immense relief to be told the facts and to throw off the mask of forced gaiety. He can then calmly begin to set aright his troubles of conscience, which disturb him more than any bodily pains.

The fear also of exhausting the patient's ebbing forces by the exertion of receiving the sacraments is usually idle. Priests are hardly ever fussy men, their calling makes them accustomed to the needs of the sick-room. When one considers the quiet and matter-of-fact way in which the sacraments

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are administered, the few short minutes it takes to go through the Church's ritual, the soothing effect of a few murmured prayers, the last sacraments, even from a purely psychological standpoint, are more likely to further than to hinder the patient's progress. An excited and nervous visitor may easily harm the sick man; the priest, who with a still and steady voice speaks of God's infinite might and mercy, is not likely to do so. This is borne out by the experience of non-Catholic as well as Catholic nurses and doctors in hospitals. No loud and impassioned appeal as at revival meetings is made by priests in a sick-room. Nineteen centuries of experience have made Catholic priests experts in dealing with the sick so as not to hamper the work of the physician of the body. The effect of the reception of Extreme Unction is almost invariably to increase the resistance of the sick person to the power of the disease if the sacrament is received in time. Hence it is cruelty to postpone the suggestion of its reception till nothing but a miracle can save the patient from death.

Catholic doctors in this matter have an important duty, since owing to their scientific training they are usually the first to gauge correctly the state of the patient. Direct deception as to his true state, which would

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lead to the loss of the last sacraments, would be grievously sinful. On the contrary, they are bound under pain of grave sin to tell the patient of his immediate danger and in default of other informants to warn the priest: this, however, only in the case of Catholics who have been notoriously slack in their religious duties and are probably in mortal sin. The last sacraments, and especially Unction, in the case of the unconscious may be the only available means of eternal salvation, and the law of charity binds every man to aid his neighbour in extreme spiritual need when this is reasonably feasible. In the case of pious Catholics the duty of telling the patient or the bystanders of the danger, and of informing the priest if no one else is available, lies with the doctor at least under pain of venial sin. A Catholic doctor who habitually neglected this duty of charity, treating all his patients indiscriminately, whether Catholic or non-Catholic, whether pious or notoriously slack, without ever troubling to warn them of their danger, or to see that the priest is informed of their need of the last sacraments, would certainly be committing a grave sin against the law of charity. In like manner any visitor, neighbour, or friend is bound to do what he can to ensure that one who is seriously ill should

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not be deprived of the last rites of the Church.

This brings us to the question of the obligation of receiving Extreme Unction. The Church teaches that, though this sacrament is not of itself necessary for salvation, yet no one is allowed to neglect it; hence every effort and diligence must be used to see that the sick receive it when they still have the full use of their senses. Only in one set of circumstances would this sacrament be absolutely necessary for salvation, namely, if a baptized person, being in the state of mortal sin and unabsolved, became unconscious after having made only an act of imperfect contrition. If such a sinner becomes unconscious and thus incapable of making any internal act of mind and will, he can only be saved by this sacrament; if he remains unconscious till death, it is his only and last means of salvation. Even should he up to the very moment of unconsciousness have elicited no act of sorrow whatever for his sin, but later on, though bereft of speech or other means of communication, internally regain consciousness and ask God's forgiveness without attaining perfect contrition, his sins would be forgiven him and his ultimate salvation secure. This presupposes that he had at least the habitual desire of dying with

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the last rites of the Church, for should even this desire have been lacking, Extreme Unction would be of no avail.

But if a man is not conscious of any grave sin or at least has confessed it and been absolved, is he still bound under grave obligation to receive Extreme Unction? The existence of divine positive precept in the matter cannot be proved either from scripture or tradition. The existence of an ecclesiastical precept of such grave obligation that the omission would in itself be mortal sin and thus entail eternal damnation is also very difficult to prove. The transgression of the canon law<sup>1</sup> probably does not by itself involve mortal sin. On the other hand, in the Catechism of the Council of Trent, which for centuries has been the most generally used handbook of instruction in Christian doctrine and thus well represents the mind of the Church, we read: "It is a very grievous sin to defer the Holy Unction until, all hope of recovery now being lost, life begins to ebb and the sick person is fast verging into a state of insensibility."

It may be argued from the context that this probably refers to the priest's obligation to administer, and not to the sick man's obligation to receive, though it seems hard to under-

<sup>1</sup> Canon 944.

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stand that it should be a deadly sin to delay the administration of a sacrament until a person is less fit to receive it, if there is no grave obligation to receive it at all. Be this as it may, if the refusal of this sacrament arose from contempt, or if it gave scandal, this would involve grave sin. If, however, a person refused Extreme Unction merely because he superstitiously regarded it as an augury of death, or for some foolish reason which excluded contempt or scandal, the priest could give him the benefit of the doubt, administering only Penance and Viaticum, urging him to allow the Unction at least when unconscious, or some time before death. If even this were refused, the priest would have a right to doubt the patient's sanity or to suspect contempt.

Extreme Unction cannot be repeated in the same illness, unless the sick person after Unction recovers and falls into a fresh danger of death. The reason for this is plain: the right to actual graces which this sacrament bestows continues as long as the illness which caused the danger of death continues. Hence where there is simply a gradual decline towards death without any perceptible sign of recovery, the sacrament cannot be repeated however long this slow decline may last. In this matter, however, one must judge by

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common estimation rather than by the scientific laws of medicine. Medical science may regard the slow wasting of strength in tuberculosis or cancer as one long uninterrupted process, which may continue for two or even more years; but after the first onslaught of the disease there may be at least an apparent recovery of relative health and the danger of death removed at least for some months. In such cases where there has been at least a seeming amelioration and the person has been somewhat active and able to move about, no priest would scruple to administer the sacrament again when there is a marked relapse and a recurrence of immediate danger of death. The same may be said of the danger of death through sheer old age, when the aged have shown many months of rejuvenescence.

The sacrament should not be repeated, when it is ascertained that it was received in a state of unrepented mortal sin or even sacrilegiously, but only if a person who had at first no intention of receiving it (as might be the case with apostates or heretics) later on changed his mind, and became willing to receive it.

It is not permissible to administer it to the impenitent who contumaciously persevere in mortal sin, and if this is doubtful it must be

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given conditionally.<sup>2</sup> The reason is that such contumacious perseverance in sin would normally imply unwillingness to receive the rites of the Church, and the absence of intention to receive the sacrament would render the sacrament invalid. Hence the need of the administration under condition: "if thou art capable."

Naturally the sick who are unconscious or bereft of speech should be given every benefit of the doubt; in some cases, unfortunately, no reasonable doubt is possible of deliberate, defiant, and prolonged continuance in sin and overt refusal of repentance till the last. In such cases nothing can be done. When the patient becomes unconscious or incapable of further intercourse he must be left to the mercy of God. The priest who, under pressure from sorrowing relatives, administered the sacraments to a manifestly evil liver of whose defiant perseverance in evil there could be no reasonable doubt, would sin against his sacred profession and duty. Freemasons who refuse to abandon the craft, those who persist in ordering cremation of their bodies, or who refuse to comply with a grave precept of the Church must be classed amongst contumacious and impenitent sinners and should not be anointed.

<sup>2</sup> Canon 942.



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If the sick man has expressed a wish for the visit of the priest and the priest on arrival finds him already unconscious the mere wish for the presence of the priest will normally be taken as indicating goodwill however evil the previous life of the penitent may have been, and Extreme Unction will be given. It is usually preceded by conditional absolution, but the validity and efficacy of Extreme Unction under these circumstances is more certain than that of the sacrament of Penance. It is doubtful whether Penance is valid without some outward manifestation of guilt and sorrow, whereas by God's infinite mercy Extreme Unction is certainly valid even when given to those who are incapable of any outward or inward acts at the time of reception. The Unction bestows divine grace on the soul as long as the sick man has turned from his sin and has the general intention of dying with the last rites of the Church.

Modern science has taught us that after the last breath life may often remain for a short time in those who are apparently dead, and thus the actual severance of soul from body may take place considerably after the reputed moment of death. Extreme Unction is therefore sometimes given to those who have seemingly passed away. If apparent death occurs after a long illness or old age,

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life may sometimes remain for about half an hour; if apparent death is sudden, or due to an accident and especially to drowning, life may remain for two hours and even longer. Those in charge of the dying should therefore send for the priest even though he may only arrive after death has apparently occurred. In such cases the priest will anoint the person conditionally in case life should not be completely extinct and the soul not yet have appeared before the judgement-seat of God. This condition, "if thou livest," and the condition, "if thou art capable of receiving it," are the only conditions which the priest is ever allowed to make in administering this sacrament. The latter condition might be required in the case of doubtful baptism, or doubtful willingness of the patient to receive it, for no sacrament is valid when administered against a person's will. But the condition, "if thou hast repented," or, "if thou art worthy," must never be added, for the person, though unrepentant at the very moment of administration, may repent afterwards and so obtain the grace of the valid sacrament received, as long as he was not directly unwilling to receive it.

There is sometimes a reluctance to ask for Extreme Unction for those who are indeed in danger of death by sickness but who are still

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capable of sitting up and moving about, and that for the sole reason that they are not actually in bed. This reluctance is entirely unreasonable and blameworthy. There is no need to be in bed for the administration of this sacrament. Some persons are mortally ill, yet do not take to bed till a few days or hours before death; some, in fact, do not take to bed at all; the long-expected death carries them off in a moment. It would be a cruel folly to deprive such persons of the great graces of this sacrament received in time. Moreover, as the anointing of the feet may for any reasonable cause be omitted, there is no difficulty in anointing someone sitting in a chair, nor is there anything unseemly or improper for a person, who has received Extreme Unction, to be up again and moving about soon afterwards. This Unction is most emphatically not a sacrament of the dying, but a sacrament of the sick; anyone seriously ill should receive it.

A doubt has been raised whether a person who would be in danger of death if he did not undergo an operation, but who is in no danger if he does, would be a fit subject for this sacrament. The doubt is more theoretical than practical. A person who, according to the ordinary laws of nature, is certain not to die if he takes the proper medicine, under-

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goes the proper treatment or submits to a minor operation, properly speaking is not in danger of death at all. Many diseases were formerly fatal which have ceased to be so because the proper treatment has been found. A minor operation may be defined as one of which experience teaches that it has normally no fatal issue, so that the person who undergoes it is not appreciably in greater danger of death than he normally is. On the other hand, a state of body necessitating an operation which considerably enhances the chances of death is obviously a serious illness, making the patient a fit subject for Extreme Unction; hence it should be administered before the operation and not after, even if a high percentage of those undergoing it regain consciousness and completely recover.

It is quite certain that this sacrament, if conferred upon persons in perfect health, would be invalid, and such attempted administration would constitute a sacrilege. Unfortunately a custom of this kind exists among the schismatic Greeks, but has been definitely reprobated by the Catholics.

Another question is whether the sacrament could be validly repeated in the same illness. Such repetition, as we have seen, is at present against Church law if the patient remains in exactly the same danger of death. But

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would it be invalid if it were done? For instance, it is not a rare occurrence in great hospitals or busy parishes for a priest mistakenly to anoint a person who has already been anointed before by another priest. We possess no absolute certainty in this matter, but everything seems to point to its being valid, though according to present legislation illicit. For many generations in many districts Unction used to be given to the sick on seven, or at least on several, consecutive days. Now it is hard to believe that only one of these administrations was a valid sacrament, or that altogether they constituted only one sacrament, which became valid only on the seventh day after the last administration. The same practically applies when several priests anoint consecutively on the same day, all performing the Unction and pronouncing the words. Such repeated administration might be compared to the repeated administration of the sacrament of Penance, which is at present in use, when a penitent after the lapse of a few days or even only hours begs for absolution, submitting to the keys in confession only sins formerly confessed and already sacramentally absolved. Extreme Unction is the complement of Penance, normally intended, if not for the removal of mortal sin, then for the removal of

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venial sin, and of all consequences of sin. Such repeated remission, whether by Penance or by Extreme Unction, is valid, because at each administration there is a further infusion of sanctifying grace for the undoing of sin. On the other hand, the title to actual graces of comfort and strength throughout the whole of his illness is valid and sound at the first administration of the Unction, and there is no further strict need for its repetition in the same sickness.

Though the Church allows the repetition of Absolution and urges repeated reception of the Viaticum for the sick man, at present for wise reasons she does not allow the repetition of the Unction for the sake of mere devotion as long as the same danger of death lasts. Her practice, however, is very lenient in this matter, and no priest need have any scruple of exposing the sacrament to invalidity in a case of doubt, whether in a protracted illness the same danger of death has continued or not. There is certainly no need for him to add a condition "if thou art anew in danger of death," when in common estimation the patient has had a recovery and a relapse.

As Extreme Unction is instituted as a sacrament of the living, for the increase of sanctifying grace, not for its first bestowal,

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the patient is bound, if conscious, to place himself in the state of grace before reception. This he can do either by an act of perfect contrition or by attrition with the sacrament of Penance. Only in the case of Holy Communion does the Church command previous actual confession and absolution for those in mortal sin. The case is different with regard to Extreme Unction. It is sufficient that the sick man be in the state of grace acquired whether by perfect contrition or by the sacrament of Penance. Naturally, if confession could be made, it would be hazardous for anyone in grievous sin to trust to an act of perfect contrition; and it would be foolish, for the grave obligation would remain to confess before death, even after reception of Extreme Unction.





THE EFFECTS OF EXTREME  
UNCTION



### CHAPTER III

## THE EFFECTS OF EXTREME UNCTION

THE effects of this sacrament are best stated in the words of the Council of Trent: "This effect is the grace of the Holy Ghost, whose Unction blots out sins, if any remain to be expiated, and the consequences of sin, and alleviates and strengthens the soul of the sick person, by exciting in him a great confidence in the divine mercy, sustained by which he bears more lightly the troubles and sufferings of disease and more easily resists the temptations of the demon lying in wait for his heel and sometimes, when it is expedient for the soul's salvation, recovers health."

If we analyse this statement we see that it includes four distinct results of the sacrament:

- (1) Remission of the guilt of sins, if the sick man has any.
- (2) Remission of the "reliquiæ," relics or consequences of past sin.

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- (3) Strengthening of the soul by exciting confidence in God, thus giving patience and vigour against temptation.
- (4) Restoration of bodily health, if expedient.

The remission of the guilt of sin is mentioned first because of its supreme importance, although it is an effect which is not always produced, because the sick man may happily not have the guilt of any sins on his soul. The word "sins" refers to sins quite generally, whether mortal or venial. If it be thought that surely everyone has some sins on his soul, at least venial sins, and that therefore the very condition "if he be in sin" has no meaning unless mortal sin be meant, this thought does not correspond with facts. The sick man may have made a good confession even of his venial sins immediately previous to reception of Extreme Unction, or he may by an act of perfect contrition or by acts of intense love of God have had all his venial sins forgiven. In such a case, which we need not restrict to the Saints only, Extreme Unction does not remove any stain of guilt.

It will at once be asked what must be the state of soul of the recipient in order to allow

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this sacrament to remit the guilt of his sins. In the case of mortal sins the person must be at least in a state of "habitual" repentance, *i.e.* after his last mortal sin he must at least once have elicited an act of attrition and never have revoked the same. If in such a state unconsciousness and the danger of death should overtake him, Extreme Unction would remit his sin and open to him the gate of heaven. Should he previously to death regain consciousness and have the opportunity of confession, he is still bound to confess his sin, for such is the will of Christ; but his soul, having been cleansed from mortal stain, is safe for eternity and has escaped the doom of eternal loss. It is this wonderful efficacy of Last Anointing which creates its unique importance in the eyes of priests and faithful, especially in the case of careless Catholics, who may be suddenly overtaken by unconsciousness and the danger of death. In such cases it is of greater importance than priestly absolution, for the validity of absolution pronounced over those who are totally unconscious and thus unable to give any outward sign of acknowledgement of sin and repentance is a matter of doubt. Conditional absolution is indeed always given in such cases, but whether such absolution, in the absence of any outward token of repentance

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whatever on the part of the recipient, is a valid sacrament is not certain. The sacrament of Extreme Unction needs no such outward sign on the part of the recipient; a mere inward willingness, once conceived and never retracted, suffices for its validity, and a mere inward state of attrition, if never retracted, suffices for its efficacy in remitting sin.

The efficacy of this sacrament is so great that it might produce its effect even should it have been received in a state of unconsciousness by a sinner, who had not yet repented of his sins, but who had the general wish to die as a Catholic and make his peace with God before he died. If such a sinner regained a moment's consciousness and in that moment conceived a horror for his sin and asked God's pardon by some inward act, however imperfect, his sin would be forgiven him in virtue of this sacrament and he would be certain of eternal salvation. God only can tell how many owe their escape from everlasting loss to Extreme Unction alone. It is the last haven of refuge provided by the infinite divine mercy for those who were about to make the final shipwreck of their lives. "And if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him," wrote St James, thereby manifesting the almost incredible lengths to

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which the loving-kindness of a merciful God can go.

So much for the forgiveness of mortal sin, should the sick man have it on his soul. But what of venial sin? The sick man is strictly bound to be in the state of grace either by confession or contrition previous to reception of Extreme Unction. There is no such strict obligation to be free from venial sin. No doubt every good Catholic normally would confess all the venial sins he remembered in the confession preceding Extreme Unction, and thus obtain forgiveness of them in the sacrament of Penance. Yet we must not forget, first, that in strict obligation he is not bound to do so, and secondly, that a valid absolution of one or more venial sins does not necessarily involve the remission of all of them. In consequence the existence of the guilt of venial sins in a person's soul previous to Extreme Unction is surely not a rare occurrence, even in the case of those who have led good lives and are accounted practising and devout Catholics.

Does Extreme Unction affect such venial sins or does it not? We may answer with almost absolute certainty in the affirmative. There has indeed been no explicit declaration on this question by Pope or Council. "If he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him," said

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St James. No valid reason can be shown why in this text we should limit the meaning of "sins" to mortal sins, and such limitation seems irreconcilable with the nature of Extreme Unction. This sacrament has eminently a medicinal character, it is a sacrament of Healing, and a complement of the sacrament of Penance in the case of the sick. The forgiveness of mortal sin is rather of the nature of a resurrection than a healing, hence such forgiveness is not the primary purpose of the sacrament. It is rather the forgiveness of venial sins that would seem to be characteristic of the sacrament of Healing. Venial sins are in fact the great cause of spiritual sickness and their removal the very essence of the healing of the soul and restoration to spiritual health.

May we then hold that Extreme Unction always remits all venial sins in the recipient?

Although in a sense the answer is in the affirmative, yet we must explain and limit our affirmation. No sin is ever forgiven without repentance, and this applies to venial sins as well as to mortal; hence the guilt of venial sins to which the penitent is still attached, and for which he has no real purpose of amendment, remains upon the soul, and this no sacrament can remove without a real change of mind. Deliberate feelings and



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acts of uncharity, deliberate refusal to rectify small matters of dishonesty or to unsay words against the character of one's neighbour, deliberate murmurings at the hardness of one's lot, and a great number of other small faults may still mar the soul even of those who are stretched on a sick-bed and who would shrink from any grievous sin or from venial sins of the more serious kind. The human heart is so strange and intricate a labyrinth of motives and affections that it is possible to show genuine fervour in prayer and almost at the same time to manifest glaring faults of character continued with unmistakable deliberation and full consent. So long as these thus continue, Extreme Unction cannot directly remove their guilt, for without repentance there is no forgiveness. It is quite true that the guilt of venial sins can be removed indirectly by the intensity of the love of God without these faults being individually remembered and repudiated. Venial sins are a retardation in our journey towards God, not a complete deviation or aversion from our last end; hence greater fervour in our tending towards God undoes the harm venial sin has done. Yet as long as the complacency of the will in evil continues, so long does the inhibition remain, and the soul is hampered and hindered by

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affection to sin, be it only venial. Extreme Unction; then, removes the guilt of all those venial sins from which the heart has turned with at least implicit sorrow.

The forgiveness of sin whether mortal or venial by Extreme Unction remains, however, a purely conditional effect: "if he be in sins." Scripture and tradition presuppose that the sacrament is often received when no guilt of sin, whether mortal or venial, stains the soul of the recipient. In such happy circumstances has this sacrament then nothing to do with the removal of the effects of sin?

When we consider that the Council of Trent calls Extreme Unction "the complement of Penance," and, moreover, that St James plainly connects the two sacraments of Penance and Unction by adding "Confess therefore your sins one to another," it becomes clear that even when no guilt actually stains the soul of the recipient, Extreme Unction extends its power in some way to the consequences of sin. The sacrament being essentially one of spiritual healing must affect every spiritual infirmity which is the outcome of sin. This is implied in the very form employed in the Church: "May God pardon whatever thou hast done amiss," "Indulgeat quidquid deliquisti." If, then, there be no actual guilt, only the consequences

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of sin can be meant, and this is expressly stated by the Council of Trent. What, then, precisely does the Council mean by *reliquias peccati*, "remnants of sin"? Every sin committed enfeebles the soul and makes it more prone to sin. The wound of sin, even though it be healed, leaves a scar. The healing of sin is a complicated progress. It is the complete restoration to full health of mind and will after these have been debilitated by the sinful embracing of evil. All sin engenders a certain obscurity of mind and frailty of will, a lack of vigour in resistance to further evil. These things may remain, even though the total aversion from God in mortal sin, or the clinging to temporal good to the detriment of our love of God in venial sin, has actually ceased and the guilt of past sin has been forgiven by the application of Christ's atonement to the repentant sinner.

The memory of past sin, moreover, is constantly with the sinner, even though he has been sacramentally absolved, and the cry "*amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea*" naturally rises to his lips. Confidence in God is harder for the man who has to look back on a life of sin, or a life of innumerable venial faults, than for the Saint who has served his God for many years and who can

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say with St Anthony: "I have served my Lord for eighty years, why should I fear to meet him now?" It is this complete healing from all spiritual sickness induced by past sin which Extreme Unction is intended to achieve.

In the numberless touching representations of the death of our Blessed Lady which mediæval sculpture or painting has left to us, St Peter and the Apostles surround her death-bed, according to legend, but the artist with truly Catholic instinct has never attempted to represent the administration of Extreme Unction. The sinless Mother of God had no need of this sacrament, which is in its nature a complement of Penance and is intended to remove, if not always directly the guilt of sin, at least the consequences of it. Her soul needed no healing of any kind to render it strong and vigorous in the hour of death. St John is indeed often represented as giving Holy Communion to the Mother of God, for she could receive this great sacrament of spiritual life to increase her love for her divine Son; but a sacrament which suggests at least the memory of past sin was not for her.

Be all this said to make clear what is meant by "the remnants of sin" counteracted by the grace of Extreme Unction.

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There remains the further question whether Extreme Unction also remits the temporal punishment due to forgiven sin, and this question also has to be answered in the affirmative. It has been the constant teaching of theologians that this sacrament constitutes the final consummation of all spiritual cure, by which man is made ready for participation in heavenly glory. The purpose of Extreme Unction is that at the moment of death nothing should remain which might be a hindrance to the soul's immediate entrance into its eternal reward.

It may well be asked: if this sacrament is intended to remove even the temporal punishment of sin, what then remains of purgatory for those who receive it? Why further blessings and the gaining of indulgences? The answer is that all sacraments do indeed give the grace which they signify, but the measure of the grace bestowed depends on the disposition of the recipient. Millions receive Holy Communion day by day, all receive the same kind of grace, but amongst them all there are perhaps not two who receive exactly the same amount. So likewise of those who receive Extreme Unction in the same hospital, or on the same battlefield, hundreds may receive the same sacred anointing, which signifies and effects the healing of nature

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wounded by sin, and is meant to render the soul sound and fit for immediate entrance into glory, yet perhaps not two receive exactly the same measure of grace.

If they are conscious, the measure of grace received will depend upon the actual devotion at the moment of reception and the state of their soul previous to it; if they are unconscious but in a state of repentance—habitually attrite as theologians would say—it will depend upon the state of their soul when the sacrament is administered. Certainly the guilt of mortal sins will infallibly be forgiven, likewise the guilt of some venial sins. But it may well be that the guilt of many venial sins will remain, owing to lack of repentance for them, therefore also the debt of punishment due to them. Extreme Unction is not an automatic means of escape from purgatory, though the purpose of the sacrament is undoubtedly to remit the debt of temporal punishment, and it does indeed remit it entirely, if received with perfect dispositions.

The case of Extreme Unction is not unlike that of a Plenary Indulgence. A Plenary Indulgence is intended to remit the whole of the temporal punishment due, and if received in perfect dispositions and without any attachment to sin it will always

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achieve its object. But it would be rash to assert that all who perform correctly the outward works prescribed are thereby acquitted of all debt of purgatory. Indulgences are not sacraments, of course, but they at least resemble them in this that when applied to the living they are an exercise of spiritual power to which some spiritual result is infallibly attached, if the work prescribed is performed in proper dispositions.

We now come to the most characteristic grace bestowed by Last Anointing, the grace of "raising up" the sick man. "The Lord shall raise him up." The Greek word used might almost be translated "stir up," "wake up." It means the bestowal of unwonted strength and vigour on those who are prostrate through sickness. By lowering vitality and introducing disorder into the sensitive life grievous illness is apt to interfere with the workings of the soul in mind and will. Sickness means lethargy, exhaustion, inability to concentrate, stupor, and even illusions, and hence extreme difficulty in prayer when prayer is the great necessity. Sickness means fever, unnatural excitement, physical irritation, inward annoyance, and perhaps intense pain; all these make the continuance of spiritual activities most difficult. Sickness may mean horror of approach-

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ing death, an almost complete enfeeblement of natural powers, a conjuring up of phantasms which lay the soul open to suggestions of despair, or at least to lack of trust in God; and to these may be added the paralysing dread of appearing before the Great Judge. It has been and still is the constant conviction of all those who are versed in spiritual matters, that the devil takes advantage of the enfeeblement of disease in men for his own purpose and that he uses his utmost endeavours for the perdition of a soul before that soul passes out of the sphere of his power by a holy death. It is not in vain that myriads of Catholic lips for centuries have prayed: "Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death." If after the daily Sacrifice we pray to St Michael to defend us in the day of battle, we stand in utmost need of every defence on the day when the final issue hangs in the balance.

The mercy of God has invented this sacrament to assist us in our utmost need: a medicine, a healing unction to counteract supernaturally the danger to the soul arising from the impending dissolution of the body; a strengthening and invigoration of the soul to overcome the languor and the confusion of mind connected with serious illness, and the menace of death.

It is remarkable that the two sacraments



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which have the special purpose of imparting strength of soul and vigour in combat have the anointing with oil as outward sign of their inward grace: Confirmation and Extreme Unction. They have this in common, that by anointing the body they signify the preparation for battle. But Confirmation, which is the complement of Baptism and imparted at the beginning of life's struggle, views man as a child of God regenerated and fresh from God in the integrity of his new spiritual life. It anoints the body of the young warrior who goes out to battle. In Extreme Unction the same warrior is regarded as in many ways worsted and defeated and overcome by sin. The Church again anoints him and the essential meaning is the same. The gift is called a "*confortatio animæ*," even as confirmation was called a *confirmatio*, a strengthening for combat. If the words used in administration are different, it is because the circumstances are different. After a long fight with sin the warrior needs that his wounds be healed; and so God is asked to deal kindly with all things in which the weary warrior has failed in the past. The aim of this sacrament is to restore the sick man to that complete health and vigour of soul in which Baptism and Confirmation had placed him at the beginning of life's combat.

There has been and to a certain extent still

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is a discussion amongst theologians which is the principal effect of these many spiritual effects just enumerated: (1) the remission of grievous sin, (2) the remission of venial sins, (3) the remission of the remnants of sin, (4) the remission of the temporal punishment of forgiven sin, and (5) the strengthening of the soul in its hard and perhaps final struggle. Which, it is asked, is the essential grace of which the sacrament is the efficient sign, the grace which it must always of necessity produce if worthily received and from which the other effects follow?

Some have held that the essential grace is the undoing of past sin, if not in its guilt, at least in its consequences. These theologians appeal to the meaning of the sacramental form as now used in the Latin Church: "May God pardon whatever thou hast done amiss."

Others have placed the essential grace in the strengthening of the soul, so necessary in the time of sickness. They have argued that if we regard the sacrament as essentially remissive of sin, it could not be validly received by a person who by confession or perfect contrition had been freed from the guilt of all his sins, by a Plenary Indulgence had paid the whole debt of punishment due, and by a life of great holiness had undone all the scars and wounds of sin. A sacrament,

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they urge, that cannot give its essential grace is no valid sacrament. These authors plead that some of the very greatest Saints have been anointed, and it might well be supposed that on their death-bed they had undone all their sins by their intense love of God. Moreover, St James seems to stress the raising up of the soul of the sick man, rather than the conditional forgiveness of sin, if the sick man have any. These reasons would at first sight seem decisive, but for the strong and insurmountable argument to the contrary derived from the Latin sacramental form, which is indicative of pardon of sin. A sacrament must always give the grace it signifies, and the form of words used in administration must needs indicate this grace.

The solution of the problem lies no doubt in the fact that no person on earth can be completely free from all consequences of past sin. He may be free from any guilt of sin, he may be free from all vindictive punishment due to sin, the justice of God may be completely satisfied, yet some consequences may still remain. Our Lady excepted, no one has ever led a life without all sin, however slight, but all sin leaves some enfeebling result on the soul. It impairs a man's spiritual health, it lowers his strength. In a state of illness and approaching death a

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person needs all the strength and full supernatural health of soul to face his dangers, and it is this complete health of soul which the sacrament intends to give. The sacrament deals not with abstractions but with realities, and in reality, Mary excepted, no saint has claimed that he never knew sin. Hence all can profit by a sacrament which restores divine grace which was in some degree impaired by a past fault. The bestowal of spiritual vigour on a sinner in bodily illness is therefore at the same time an undoing of sin; and therefore the form of this sacrament indicates the undoing of sin: "Indulgeat . . . quidquid deliquisti."

Moreover, the great need in illness is the divine assurance of a merciful judgement to come. Dread of the holiness of God and the rigour of his justice may disturb the soul, however slight the sins committed and however great the repentance of the sinner. It is this distressing and agonizing fear which the sacrament intends to counteract. It is intended to fill the sick man with a Christian courage that through God's loving-kindness and infinite mercy the victory over evil will lie with him.

We conclude therefore that in reality the *confortatio animæ* and undoing of sin coincide; they are but the negative and positive

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aspect of identically the same grace. It is essentially a sacrament of healing, but healing is undoing of disease and that by an inpouring of strength. Logically, no doubt, the *confortatio animæ* precedes, but in fact the two coincide. We must carefully note that the Latin form does not directly mention the forgiveness of the guilt of sin, but uses deliberately the general expressions: *indulgeat tibi Dominus*, "may God deal mercifully with thee"; *quidquid deliquisti*, "with regard to anything there is still amiss," in consequence of any sins committed.

Finally, we have to deal with the last result of this sacrament: the restoration of bodily health if God sees it to be expedient. Is there any rule or principle on which God acts in this matter and which we can know?

Some have suggested that God always restores to health if this is for the ultimate spiritual good of the patient. In consequence, if he foresees that, if now restored to health the patient would finally die in sin and be lost or at least would make a less good death than now, God would not arrest the course of the disease. This suggestion is, however, hardly tenable, for it would practically be equivalent to a private revelation to all those who recovered after Extreme Unction in the

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hour of death, that they could be certain of final salvation.

How then is this temporal effect connected with the sacrament? Is it a miracle? Does God suspend the laws of nature and on the occasion of Extreme Unction use his omnipotence apart from natural laws? It would seem not, because we are repeatedly warned not to postpone the reception of Extreme Unction precisely because this would be to force God's hand to work a miracle by raising up a man actually in the throes of death.

If, then, the restoration is not necessarily miraculous, but some utilization of nature's forces by God, how have we to conceive this? "The Lord will raise him up." This raising up is by actual graces bestowed upon the soul; for the soul reacts upon the body, as well as the body on the soul. Medical science will tell us that cheerfulness, mental happiness, and the encouragement of bystanders, normally make a great difference to the patient for betterment. Despondency is most deleterious to those in sickness, courage and brightness of character are of immense importance. Many a person recovers by the sheer will to live and struggles against the physical laws of sickness by an indomitable character.

If science tells us this in the purely natural

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sphere, how much more is this true when God by supernatural actual graces affects the soul for its strengthening and comfort? Beyond all doubt God can and sometimes does directly act on the bodily frame of man, thus curing him in a directly miraculous way, either by increasing natural recuperative power, or by directly creating new forces which make for health. For all we know he does so sometimes on account of the sacrament received. But there seems no absolute divine rule always connecting such miracles with Extreme Unction. Miracles must always be rare; they are the exception, not a matter of steady regularity. The sacrament bestowed on unconscious persons in the very throes of death does but exceedingly rarely restore bodily health. If it always did, death would be abolished. Hence it is presumptuous folly to postpone its reception till the last moment and expect escape from death. But even when received in the early stages of illness and received with great piety and devotion there seems to us no apparent rule by which God acts.

We are bound to believe that God will do so if it is expedient. Expedient to whom? To all men? To some men, amongst the relatives and household? To the sick man himself? It is certainly expedient to the

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sick man that he die at some time, for death is the gateway to heaven. If he be well-disposed, it may be expedient that he die now. The expediency, however, will be judged by God, whose Providence attains all men and takes every circumstance into account. Now the Council of Trent says: "if it be expedient to the soul's salvation," and thus evidently includes in the reasons for recovery the spiritual profit of the man's soul. On the other hand, the Council distinctly adds the word *interdum*, "sometimes," thus suggesting that, even if there is some foreordained plan and rule whereby these things are regulated, we do not know it. No doubt priests, doctors, and nurses have repeatedly noticed the most amazing changes for the better in sick persons after Anointing, and it is no wonder that people have often cried "miracle" after such a surprising recovery. God thus vindicates the dignity and the power of his sacraments and the early devout reception of Extreme Unction is certainly a powerful appeal to the omnipotent mercy of God for the recovery of bodily health.

The reviviscence of this sacrament, although briefly alluded to previously, needs a few words of explanation. Baptism, Confirmation, and Orders may be received



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without due disposition. In such a case these sacraments are valid and cannot be repeated, but the grace of them is not bestowed until the recipient repents and puts himself in the necessary state of soul. Such subsequent resurrection of sacramental energy goes by the name of reviviscence. This is universally accepted in the case of the three sacraments just mentioned, because they imprint an indelible mark on the soul and can be received only once in a lifetime. It is practically certain that the same is true of Matrimony. Though it leaves no indelible mark on the soul, yet it is normally received only once in life, and it is hard to believe that a married person should for ever be deprived of the graces needed for the married state owing to his sinful state at the moment of his wedding. There is probably no reviviscence of Penance, because being itself the sacrament of Penitence, it is utterly invalid when penitence is absent; and the reviviscence of Holy Communion, if received in mortal sin, is usually considered impossible.

In the case of Extreme Unction there exists no absolute certainty of its reviviscence; yet this can hardly be doubted. Theologians are practically unanimous that when received in the state of unrepented mortal sin it revives if the sick man later

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repents. Such reviviscence of the grace of Unction is, however, strictly limited to the period of the illness and would not occur if the patient only repented after the recovery of health. During the same danger of death through illness Extreme Unction, once validly received, remains an efficacious title to grace, though its effect is suspended as long as the patient remains in unrepentant mortal sin. Let him remove the obstacle by repentance and the grace will be bestowed. Should, however, a fresh mortal sin be committed after the reception of Extreme Unction, the guilt of this could only be removed either by perfect contrition or attrition with the actual reception of the sacrament of Penance. Extreme Unction can remit the guilt of sin incurred before and in its reception, but not that of sins committed afterwards. The priest then, should he learn that the patient was in unrepented mortal sin during the reception of Extreme Unction, should not repeat the administration, for according to Church law it must be given only once in the same illness. The only possible reason for repeating the rite would be if the priest ascertained that the patient had been unwilling to receive it, for no sacrament is valid if bestowed on an unwilling subject.

However great the divine ingenuity in

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contriving means of grace for the children of men, God's benign purposes can be foiled by the malice of man, but as far the indulgence of the divine Father in heaven can go without destroying human liberty, so far does his tender mercy reach in this most holy Unction.

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